

Satirizing international crises. The depiction of the Ukraine, Greek debt, and migration crises in political satire

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Abstract

In international crises, the media's information and orientation function is particularly important in the public sphere. While the news media's crisis coverage has been well researched and often criticized, very little is known about the depiction of crises in political satire. This study examines how German satirical shows ($n = 154$ episodes, 2014–2016) covered the Ukraine, Greek debt, and migration crises and whether or not these depictions corresponded to news media logic. In its attention to the crises, satire follows news media's conflict orientation. Parallels with news media logic also relate to the information function because the predominant frame elements in satirical shows mirror governmental positions. This is different regarding the orientation function. In their evaluation of the frame elements, satirical shows' criticism of governmental positions and their support for minority positions create a counter-narrative for the crises. Thus, satirical shows provide added value for public discourse.

Keywords

political satire, international crises, Ukraine crisis, Greek debt crisis, migration crisis, crisis coverage, content analysis, media functions

Satire has a firm place in today's media landscape. Especially in times of crisis, satirical approaches to the current political, social, and economic situation proliferate (Boland, 2012; Griffin, 1994; Lewis, 2006; McClennen & Maisel, 2014). This is not only because bad news invites mockery and crises challenge social norms (Lewis, 2006), but also because the news media extensively cover crisis events. Thus, the audience already has basic information about a crisis, which is a necessary precondition for understanding jokes (Wyer & Collins, 1992).

From a social perspective, a crisis can be defined as a process (McNair, 2016) within which situations or disruptive events are perceived as a "serious threat to the basic structures or fundamental values and norms of a system" (Rosenthal, Hart, & Charles, 1989, p. 10). Crises can arise from external attacks, inter- or inner-state conflicts, or from natural or man-made catastrophes. They affect large numbers of people and are related to a

high degree of uncertainty, instability, emotional stress, and fear (Perse & Lambe, 2017). This makes them situations "for which people/publics seek causes and make attributions" (Coombs & Holladay, 2004, p. 97).

In our globalized and highly mediated world with international political and economic networks, crises frequently extend beyond national borders and achieve an international dimension (Cottle, 2009; Schwarz, Seeger, & Auer, 2017). Being a central source of information and interpretation, the media are highly influential in the public perception of a crisis (Perse & Lambe, 2017). In national as well as transnational contexts, media coverage influences public and political responses to crisis news, challenges political authority, and pressures politics for action (Gilboa, 2005; Miller, 2007).

Research typically concentrates on the news media's coverage of crises (Entman, 2004; Kampf & Liebes, 2013; Nohrstedt & Ottosen, 2014; for an overview see

Schwarz et al., 2017). The content of other media formats such as YouTube-channels, weblogs, left- and right-wing magazines, satire, and comedy has received very little academic attention so far (Atton & Hamilton, 2008; Bessant, 2017; Fuchs, 2010; Harrington, 2011). Our contribution focuses on the coverage of international crises in satirical shows. Satirical shows such as late night formats or fake news shows have spread around the world in recent years (Baym & Jones, 2012) and are controversially discussed regarding their consequences for society and individuals (Hart & Hartelius, 2007; Holbert, 2013; McClennen & Maisel, 2014).

Satire is typically associated with aggression, judgement, mockery, play, laughter, and references to societal norms (Behrman, 2002; Brummack, 1971; Day, 2011; Test, 1991). When it addresses political issues, satire attacks power structures. It provides social commentary and criticism, which can add to controversial societal debates and even influence public discourse.¹ Satire can thus be considered “a particularly potent form of political communication” (Gray, Jones, & Thompson, 2009, p. 12; see also Caufield, 2008) that frequently challenges established perspectives on events with a counter-narrative (Hill, 2013). Despite their focus on entertainment, satirical shows can contribute to communicative functions in the political public sphere that are typically attributed to journalism and the news media (Baym, 2005; Bessant, 2017; McClennen & Maisel, 2014; Michael, 2017). Against this background, it is scarcely surprising that satirical shows facilitate political learning (Baek & Wojcieszak, 2009; Kim & Vishak, 2008).

Studies on political satire predominantly concentrate on the effects of these shows (e.g., Boukes, Boomgaarden, Moorman, & de Vreese, 2015; Landreville, Holbert, & LaMarre, 2010; Lee, 2012; Matthes & Rauchfleisch, 2013). Much less is

known about the actual content of political satire. The few existing studies usually provide an overview of the variety of issues and political actors that are addressed in the shows (e.g., Fox, Koloen, & Sahin, 2007; Lichtenstein & Nitsch, 2018; Lichter, Baumgartner, & Morris, 2015; ; Nitsch & Lichtenstein, 2013). Issue-specific studies (e.g., Feldman, 2013) that allow for deeper insights into the coverage of satirical shows are rare.

This contribution addresses the research gap in issue-specific studies by focusing on the coverage of international crises in satirical television shows. In relation to media’s communicative functions in the political public sphere, we discuss the deficiencies of news media’s crisis coverage and how satire might provide additional value for public discourse. Conducting a systematic content analysis, we then examine how satirical shows in Germany covered three international crises in recent years; namely, the Ukraine, Greek debt, and migration crises. We discuss parallels with and differences from news media logic and point out which functions satire fulfills in mediated crisis communication.

1 Crisis coverage in news media and satirical shows

1.1 Functions and deficiencies of crisis coverage

The media’s communicative functions in the public sphere have been discussed since the beginning of mass communication theory (e.g., Lasswell, 1948; Merton, 1949; Wright, 1986). According to McQuail (2010) the media should 1) inform the public and indicate power relationships, 2) provide orientation, interpretation, and explanation, 3) promote continuity and commonality of values, 4) entertain the audience and enable relaxation and stress-reduction, and 5) mobilize the public towards societal objectives. For political communication in the public sphere (and thus also for crisis coverage), information and orientation are especially relevant (Perse & Lambe, 2017). This is because

¹ A recent example is the “Varoufake-Video” by German satirist Jan Böhmermann. The satirical video questions both news media’s coverage on the Greek debt crisis and the position of the German government (Bessant, 2017).

citizens of democracies are expected to acquire knowledge and form considered opinions about political issues (Habermas, 2006). While information includes presenting backgrounds and different perspectives on crisis events, orientation is provided when the media comment on events and take a position (for example, regarding questions of responsibility and solutions for a crisis). Both functions are typically associated with normative expectations of the work of news media journalists as the main communicators in a mediated public sphere (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, & White, 2009; Patterson, 2013).

The media not only reports crisis events but has a “more active performative involvement and *constitutive* role” (Cottle, 2006, p. 9, emphasis in original). They pick up conflict events and situations and incorporate them into a specific media logic. In this mediatization of crises, the media constructs crisis narratives that serve as a basis for interactions with other societal actors and have real consequences (Hjarvard, Mortensen, & Eskjaer, 2015; Walby, 2015). News media’s performance in crisis contexts, however, has frequently been the subject of intense criticism (e.g., Entman, 2004; Hamelink, 2011; Lynch & Galtung, 2010; Nohrstedt & Ottosen, 2014). Criticism is directed at the short attention span of news media. It is argued that news media’s attention concentrates on highly conflict ridden situations, provides little background information on a crisis, or information about the later reconciliation processes (Lynch & Galtung, 2010; Nohrstedt & Ottosen, 2014). During the media’s attention span, so-called “disaster marathons” (Katz & Liebes, 2007; Liebes, 1998) leave little room for critical reflection and verification checks, and are highly prone to spreading misinformation. Instead of serving individuals and societies with “true” and unbiased information, the dramatized and unfiltered coverage can mobilize fears and cause overreactions (Altheide, 2016; Hamelink, 2011; Patterson, 2013). In addition, news media tend to domesticate international issues by stressing the relevance of events for the home

country and by focusing on national actors while neglecting other countries’ perspectives (Cottle, 2009; Eide & Ytterstad, 2011). Domestication creates the impression that the home country is affected by the crisis. It is often accompanied by blaming external actors (e.g., other countries), thereby contributing to the escalation of conflicts (Hamelink, 2011).

Information and orientation functions are further compromised when news media follow political propaganda. In times of crisis, media’s dependence on official information is especially strong because the events involve a high degree of uncertainty and surprise (Cook, 2006; Olsson, Nord, & Falkheimer, 2015). Thus, news media often resort to information from their own country’s government and military. This so-called indexing (Bennett, 1990) of official positions by the media leads to a one-sided coverage, especially when officials present a unified front and the government’s position is not challenged by opposition politicians or representatives from other institutions (Groshek, 2008; Roman, Wanta, & Bunika, 2017). With regard to U.S. media coverage of the war in Iraq in 2003, and the economic crisis of 2008, Jones and Baym (2010, p. 281) assert that whilst the public “deeply needed critical information and reasoned debate, the most influential sources of television news instead provided a steady and often debilitating diet of distraction, distortion, spectacle, and spin”. A less critical stance towards the government and a high focus on solidarity-building during a crisis can contribute to a ‘rally around the flag’ effect (Mueller, 1973). The term refers to expressions of patriotism and support for the home country government when a crisis is perceived as a threat to that society (Chowanietz, 2011; Kam & Ramos, 2008). In the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, for example, U.S. news media became reluctant to criticize official language and policies, and finally failed to hold the government responsible in the lead-up to the Iraq War (Day, 2011). While patriotism became lucrative for the media, “neutrality was often suspected as disloyal” (Wong, 2006, pp. 123–124).

Both indexing and the rally effect enable politicians to engage in crisis exploitation by presenting themselves as credible crisis managers. They can use blaming strategies that point at other countries and highlight causes for the crisis that are outside their own responsibility. Moreover, when the media refrain from critically scrutinizing political crisis reactions, politicians can strategically use the crisis to push their own political agenda (Boin, t'Hart, & McConnell, 2009; Olsson et al., 2015).

1.2 Crisis coverage in political satire

International crises such as wars, terrorism, and economic downturns are not only covered by the news media. They are also popular issues in political satirical shows (Lichter et al., 2015). Satirical shows are characterized by a strong focus on political personalities (Matthes & Rauchfleisch, 2013; Morris, 2009; Niven & Lichter, 2003). One can therefore assume that the shows mock political leaders for their performance in the crisis. In a normative view, however, satire's contribution to communicative functions in the public sphere evolves from content related criticism on political and societal discourses (McClennen & Maisel, 2014).

With their emphasis on opinions and criticism and the linking of entertainment and politics, satirical shows significantly diverge from news media's routines and principles of depiction (Caufield, 2008; Day, 2011; Gray et al., 2009). Even though the news media's agenda serves as the central point of reference for the selection of issues, the show's editorial teams mostly have journalistic experience that enables professional reflection and further investigation (Krauss, 2017; Michael, 2017). In their coverage of international crises, satirical shows can offer perspectives that are neglected in news media coverage (or relate to minority positions) and provide additional contextual information (Baym, 2005; Baym & Jones, 2012). They might thus complement deficiencies resulting from news media logic. Against this background it can be argued that satirical shows can offer added value regarding the

information and orientation function in the public sphere (see also Lichtenstein & Nitsch, 2018).

Regarding the information function, Fox et al. (2007) reveal that satire (*The Daily Show*) contains the same amount of substantial information as broadcast news. Satirical shows also convey additional information, that is, information that is not to be found in news media coverage. Unlike news media, *The Daily Show* did not reduce the Occupy movement to the issue of violence, but reflected on the broader context and on messages of the movement (Young, 2013). The German satirical show *Die Anstalt* provided important background information to the Ukraine crisis: Drawing on Krüger's (2013) analysis of networks between journalists and politics, the show highlighted the membership of prominent journalists in pro-NATO elitist circles and critically discussed journalists' role conflicts when covering NATO issues and events in the Ukraine crisis (*Die Anstalt*, April 29, 2014). As political satire is less concerned with the norm of balanced coverage, the depiction of certain issues significantly diverges from the news media. In her issue-specific study on the depiction of global warming in two satirical shows, Feldman (2013) showed that coverage of *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* is mainly concerned with scientific facts. In American news media, however, the principle of balanced coverage results in a rather high amount of climate-skeptical voices (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004). Satire serves the orientation function by taking a stance in debates and criticizing arguments and political actions. Satire can therefore be understood as a faithful watchdog (McClennen & Maisel, 2014), "challenging authority figures and disassembling their rhetoric far better than those who actually claim to operate as the fourth estate" (Harrington, 2011, p. 39). Since satire questions taken-for-granted assumptions, it can function as a revelation, exposing "flaws in rhetoric, logical fallacies, and rhetorical spin" (McClennen & Maisel, 2014, p. 165). Besides criticism, satire offers orientation by providing counter-narratives for events and process-

es (Hill, 2013). In doing so, satire can suggest solutions for a crisis (Lewis, 2006; McClennen & Maisel, 2014; Peterson, 2008).

When satire diverges from news media logic and provides an alternative account of events, it can either help or hurt the communicative function in the political public sphere (Hart & Hartelius, 2007; Holbert, 2013). The desire to present different or additional information carries the risk of relying on wrong information and spreading conspiracy theories and fake news. Furthermore, the 9/11 attacks demonstrated that satire can fail to take a critical position towards authority and join in a rally-effect instead (McClennen & Maisel, 2014). Whereas jokes about foreign enemies are “safe targets” in times of crisis and conflict (Lichter et al., 2015, p. 137), criticizing the home nation is a taboo subject. This clearly shows in Bill Mahler’s comparison of the 9/11 terrorists’ actions and the U.S.’ use of cruise missiles in his late night show *Political Incorrect*. The ensuing national uproar was followed by the withdrawal of advertising and ultimately the cancellation of the show.

2 Recent international crises

In recent years, three international crises have dominated EU and German politics: the Ukraine, Greek debt, and migration crises. While both the Ukraine and Greek debt crises had their epicenters outside of Germany, the migration crisis directly affected Germany. However, in each crisis, Germany played a significant role in international negotiations and crisis management. Even though the three crises varied greatly with respect to perception of the threat, all three of them received a high level of attention in the German news media.

In Germany, the Ukraine crisis was perceived as a threat to international security and was associated with the danger of war. With Ukraine and Russia being the two key countries, the crisis resembled an intense confrontation along the lines of the old East and West divide (for an overview, see Petro, 2017; Roman et al., 2017).

The crisis started in November 2013 with demonstrations in Independence Square (Maidan) in Kiev. Protests were directed against the government that had rejected an economic agreement with the EU due to pressure from Russia. The crisis escalated when Russia annexed Crimea in March 2014. The annexation was denounced as a violation of international law and both the EU and the US imposed travel bans and economic sanctions on Russia. The sanctions were accompanied by open dispute between Russia’s President Putin and Germany’s Chancellor Merkel (who had a leading position in the EU’s negotiations with Russia).

The Greek debt crisis centered on fears of financial instability and economic losses. It had its roots in the earlier Euro crisis (2010–2012) when Greece had to be stabilized by guarantees, ‘rescue parachutes’ loans, and a radical austerity policy. Poverty, unemployment, and distrust in established political circles characterized the situation in Greece when the left-wing party Syriza came into power in early 2015. Its strong ambitions to end austerity measures led to repeated threats of a ‘Grexit’ by Germany and other EU countries, and to an escalation of the conflict in summer 2015. Against EU-wide protests, Prime Minister Tsipras conducted a referendum in which the Greeks rejected proposals for new economic measures. After weeks of tension, Greece finally came to an agreement with the EU that kept the country inside the Eurozone (for an overview see Papaconstantinou, 2016; Tsatsanis & Tseprouglou, 2016).

During the migration crisis, the perception of threat was related to issues of security and social conflict. The migration crisis refers to the dramatic increase of refugees from African and Arab countries since 2014. The large number of asylum seekers placed enormous pressure on the EU’s external borders and led to heated debates within the EU (for an overview see Barlai, Fähnrich, Griessler, & Rhomberg, 2017). Given the tense humanitarian situation, Chancellor Merkel allowed refugees free access to Germany in September 2015. The crisis split political parties as

well as German society – to the benefit of the right-wing party AfD and the populist movement ‘Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident’ (PEGIDA). At the beginning of the crisis, Merkel was praised for her decision to keep the borders open; but, over time, criticism became more vocal.

Empirical studies reveal that the news media have constructed their coverage of the Ukraine, Greek debt, and migration crises according to principles of media logic. This has resulted in the above-mentioned normative deficiencies concerning their information and orientation functions. German news media tended to domesticate the three crises by directing their attention, for instance, to national affectedness and national politicians (Fengler et al., 2018; Lichtenstein, Ritter, & Fähnrich, 2017; Nienstedt, Kepplinger, & Quiring, 2015). With regard to the information function in the public sphere, and in line with the indexing thesis, studies point to strong parallels between news media coverage and the official position of the German government. Since news media also supported the government’s position in their evaluation, parallels can also be seen regarding the orientation function. In their depiction of the Ukraine crisis, for instance, German news media followed the government lead in blaming Russia for the crisis and supporting economic sanctions (Szostok, Gluszek-Szafraniec, & Guzek, 2016). The migration crisis was first depicted as a humanitarian catastrophe that required immediate action. Later on, threats to security and cultural homogeneity in Germany became more prominent in the news media and restrictive measures were supported (Hemmelmann & Wegner, 2016; Lichtenstein et al., 2017). We are not aware of any analyses of the depiction of the 2015 Greek debt crisis in German news media, but studies of the earlier and similar Euro crisis revealed that news media tended to blame Greece and supported austerity measures (Galpin, 2017; Nienstedt et al., 2015).

3 Research questions

While crisis coverage in the news media is well researched, the depiction of crises in satire has not yet been analyzed. Based on theoretical considerations, our interest lies in how satirical shows in Germany cover international crises and whether their coverage differs from news media logic. We focus on the Ukraine, Greek debt, and migration crises, which have received a high level of media attention in recent years. During crises, a strong alignment between conflict events and media attention is common, and empirical studies of the three crises have found further deficiencies in news media coverage. The media domesticated the three crises and showed strong parallels with government communication with regard to the inclusion and evaluation of perspectives (frames), for example, the attribution of blame to Russia in the Ukraine crisis and to Greece in the Greek debt crisis.

Our first research question refers to satire’s general attention towards the three crises (1a) and to links between the level of attention and the principles of media logic (1b). Given that news media are criticized for their focus on highly conflict-ridden crisis situations and for their tendency to domesticate crises, satirical shows can provide added value (and thus “help” democracy) by concentrating on other aspects (e.g., highlighting the effect on other countries and reflecting on events before and after the conflict).

- › RQ1a: How much attention do satirical shows pay to the Ukraine, Greek debt, and migration crises?
- › RQ1b: How pronounced are conflict orientation and domestication in satirical shows’ coverage of the three crises?

Added value regarding the information function can be provided if satirical shows offer a different frame of the crisis than news media does. This can be done by either introducing a new frame or using a frame that is underrepresented in news media. Frames selectively emphasize certain aspects of an issue and consist of el-

ements that define, explain, and evaluate relevant problems and offer treatment recommendations (Entman, 1993). The news media have frequently been criticized for solely mirroring the spectrum of official political frames (indexing) and adopting the government's crisis frames. Given the characteristics of satire, the indexing thesis should not apply to satirical shows and the addressed frames should diverge from, rather than parallel, official political frames. Our second research question therefore refers to the spectrum of crisis frames in satirical shows.

- › RQ2: Which frames are addressed in satirical shows' crisis coverage, and do they parallel official political crisis frames or differ from them?

Regarding the orientation function of satire, added value can be generated through the evaluation of frames. The indexing thesis implies that official political frames are presented in an affirmative way and it is known that news media occasionally join in a 'rally-around-the-flag' with strong support for the governments' position. News media's coverage of the analyzed three crises also points to support for governmental position. Satirical shows follow a similar logic as news media if they approve official government crisis frames. Conversely, rejection of frames that are in line with the government position, as well as approval of frames that are not in line, indicate a divergence from news media logic and add value regarding orientation. In the first case, satire provides *critical orientation*; in the second case, it provides orientation by constructing a *counter-narrative* of the crisis. Therefore, our third research question focuses on the positions towards the frames.

- › RQ3: Which frames are approved and which are rejected in satirical shows' crisis coverage and do satirical shows offer counter-narratives to official political crisis frames?

4 Method

4.1 Analyzed satirical shows

We conducted a systematic content analysis that considers three German satirical shows: *heute show*, *Neo Magazin Royale* and *Die Anstalt*. The shows are broadcast by the public service channel ZDF and cover the spectrum of political satire on German television. *Heute show* is a fake news show hosted by satirist and sports journalist Oliver Welke. It has been broadcast weekly since 2009 (Friday nights, air time: 30–45 minutes). The name refers to the channel's own news show *heute* and the show concentrates on satirizing the week's political issues.

Neo Magazin Royale is a late night show that started in 2013 on the special interest channel ZDFneo. It airs weekly (Thursday nights, air time: 30-45 minutes) and is hosted by satirist Jan Böhmermann. Since 2015 it has been repeated on Friday nights in ZDF. *Neo Magazin Royale* is primarily popular for its stories on social media but has lately attracted a great deal of political attention when Böhmermann tested the limits of freedom of speech in Germany by explicitly insulting Turkish President Erdogan.

The third show under study, *Die Anstalt*, follows the tradition of cabaret theatre and is hosted by cabaret artists Max Uthoff and Claus von Wagner, who are accompanied by different guests. It airs only eight times a year (on Tuesday nights) but has the longest air time of the three shows (50 to 60 minutes). As opposed to the other shows, *Die Anstalt* concentrates on one topic per show and is broadcast live.

With regard to their market shares, *Die Anstalt* (12.4%; Sallhof, 2015) and *heute show* (14.4%, Sanchez, 2016) differ only slightly. *Neo Magazin Royale* reaches a very small audience via TV (1%, Kyburz, 2015) but is well received via the ZDF online mediathek (Zubayr & Gerhard, 2017).

4.2 Analysis and Measures

The analysis includes all episodes of the three shows (n=154) that were broadcast between January 2014 and April 2016. In the 154 episodes (*heute show*: n=.75, *Neo*

Magazin Royale: n=61, *Die Anstalt*: n=18), we identified 584 crisis-relevant segments (*heute show*: n=340, *Neo Magazin Royale*: n=96, *Die Anstalt*: n=148). These segments focus on either the Ukraine, Greek debt, or migration crises. Since the shows often cover crisis issues for long stretches of an episode, we distinguished consecutive segments from each other. This was done by applying formal criteria (changes in the setting; e.g., from a single moderation to an interview) as well as content-related criteria (changes in the crisis-relevant sub-topic; e.g., from causes of migration to accommodation of refugees).

For the 584 crisis segments, we coded indicators for domestication and for the framing of the crises. Domestication was coded, when the crisis segment mainly relates to Germany (e.g., by highlighting German politicians, the German government's position in a crisis, or consequences of the crisis for Germany).

For the framing of the crises, we draw on Entman's (1993, p. 52) suggestion that a frame consists of four frame elements: "a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation". We follow a slight variation of the four frame elements that was put forward specifically for the analysis of crisis frames (Lichtenstein, Esau, Pavlova, Osipov, & Argylov, 2019). Accordingly, a frame entails 1) a problem definition, 2) a causal interpretation, 3) an attribution of blame, and 4) a treatment recommendation. We coded up to three problem definitions, causal interpretations, attributions of blame, and treatment recommendations per crisis segment. The frame elements were derived from previous studies on news media coverage of the three crises (Lichtenstein et al., 2019; Nienstedt et al., 2015), and validated with a selection of the material.

In addition, we coded the shows' position towards the addressed frame elements. The position was coded as either approval or rejection of a particular frame element. Approval was coded when a frame element is used as factual, truthful information; rejection when it is criticized (either implicitly, e.g., by stultifying or ex-

aggerating a given problem definition, or explicitly by providing contradicting information or allegations).

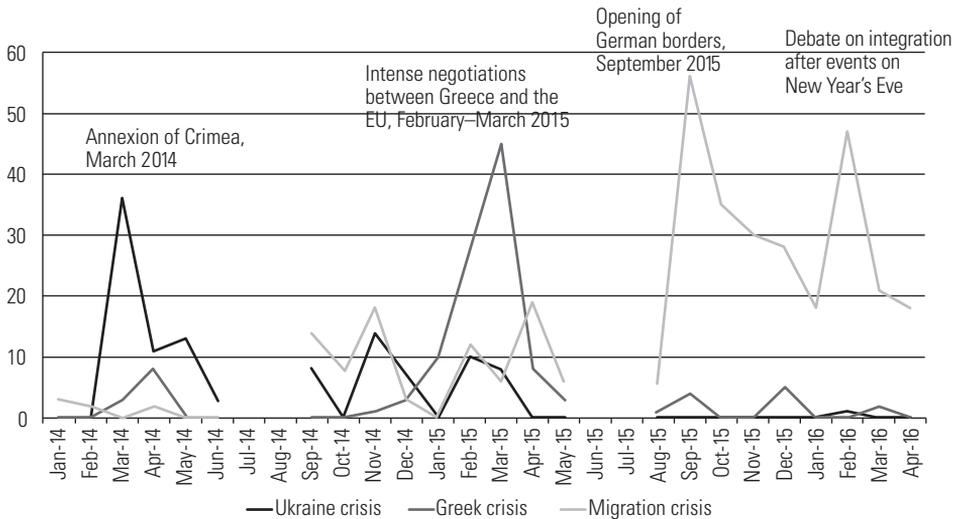
In the coding process, the authors were assisted by 16 students. All coders were trained for four weeks, partly in class and partly in teams of three. During the coder training, 15 episodes (about ten percent of the material) and selected sections from 20 more episodes were analyzed. The students were involved in the first step of coding – the identification of crisis-relevant segments in the 154 episodes (intercoder-reliability=.75, Krippendorff's alpha). In the second step, the frame elements and positions towards the elements were coded by the two authors (frame elements=.71, position towards the frame elements=.89).

5 Results

Findings on satirical shows' depiction of the Ukraine, Greek debt, and migration crises are presented in a combined view on the three analyzed shows (*Neo Magazin Royale*, *Die Anstalt*, and *heute-show*). Differences in coverage between the shows are mentioned if they have some evidential value. Our first research question refers to the attention that is paid to the three crises (RQ1a), and to the extent of domestication and conflict events in satire's crisis coverage (RQ1b).

Overall, satirical shows' attention to the three crises varies considerably. 60.3 percent of the 584 crisis segments refer to the migration crisis, 20.7 percent to the Greek debt crisis, and 19.0 percent to the Ukraine crisis. The different degrees of attention can be attributed to the degree to which Germany was affected by the crises. In the Ukraine and Greek debt crises, Germany was merely engaged in international crisis management. The sharp increase in migration and the resulting political and social problems during the migration crisis affected the country to a much greater extent. This is paralleled by the fact that the migration crisis had the greatest coverage in all three shows. However, the shows differ in terms of their relative level

Figure 1: Crisis segments in the satire shows over time (absolute numbers)



Note: Ukraine crisis (N= 111), Greek debt crisis (N= 121), migration crisis (N=352). *Neo Magazin Royale* and *Die Anstalt* were not broadcast in January 2014, 2015, and 2016. In July and August 2014 and in June and July 2015 the three shows were in summer hiatus.

of attention to the migration crisis. While it accounts for 75.0% in *Neo Magazin Royale*, it features significantly less in *Die Anstalt* (61.0%) and *heute show* (55.6%).²

In depicting the crises, a tendency to domestication only shows for the migration crisis. Given that 81.8 percent of the crisis segments refer to events and processes in Germany, satirical shows clearly increase the impression of German affect- edness by the migration crisis. Segments with a focus on Germany are much lower for the Greek debt (28.9%) and Ukraine (15.3%) crises.

The shows start covering the crises only after they began to escalate. Previous problems in Ukraine, the tense social situation in Greece (that eventually led to the election of the left-wing party Syriza), and the influx of refugees from African and Arab countries are largely neglected. Over time, coverage of each of the three crises shows a number of peaks that are clearly related to highly conflict-ridden crisis events (see figure 1). Satirical atten-

tion to the Ukraine crisis starts and peaks in March 2014 with the Russian annexion of Crimea. This is when the long-running, smoldering conflict in Ukraine turned into an overt confrontation between Russia and the West, and the crisis gained international importance. In the following months, attention towards the crisis drops significantly. Smaller peaks appear during times of international disputes (e.g., during the peace negotiations in Minsk in September 2014 and February 2015) or during the elections in Eastern Ukraine in November 2014. Afterwards, the crisis disappears completely from the satirical shows' agenda. Attention to the Greek crisis peaks with the conflicts between Greece and the EU in which Germany had a central role. Disputes about Greek debts intensified in February and March 2015 after the election of the left-wing Syriza party and the coming into office of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras.³ From spring 2015 onwards, the Greek debt crisis was no longer a subject in the satirical shows. The migration crisis receives attention following maritime disasters with high numbers of casualties

2 Attention for the Greek debt crisis ranges between 13.5% (*Neo Magazin Royale*) and 27.0% (*Die Anstalt*) and for the Ukraine crisis between 11.5% (both *Die Anstalt* and *Neo Magazin Royale*) and 24.4% (*heute show*).

3 At the time of the highly conflictual 2015 Greek referendum, all three shows were in summer hiatus.

Table 1: Average number of frame elements per crisis segment

	Ukraine crisis (n=111)	Greek debt crisis (n=121)	Migration crisis (n=352)	Total (n=584)
Problem definition	1.48	1.49	1.35	1.40
Causal interpretation	0.59	0.70	0.61	0.62
Attribution of blame	1.22	1.15	0.98	1.06
Treatment recommendation	0.35	0.70	0.52	0.53

Note. Coding of up to three problem definitions, causal interpretations, attributions of blame and treatment recommendations per crisis segment.

(e. g., in April 2015) and incidents concerning the PEGIDA movement (for example, its formation in October 2014). From September 2015 onwards, the crisis features prominently in the shows. The highest peaks relate to the opening of German borders and the events of New Year’s Eve 2015 when Germany was confronted with mass sexual assaults committed by men of Arab and North African descent. Due to the shows’ Christmas break, the sexual assaults are presented with a slight time lag (with a peak in February 2016).

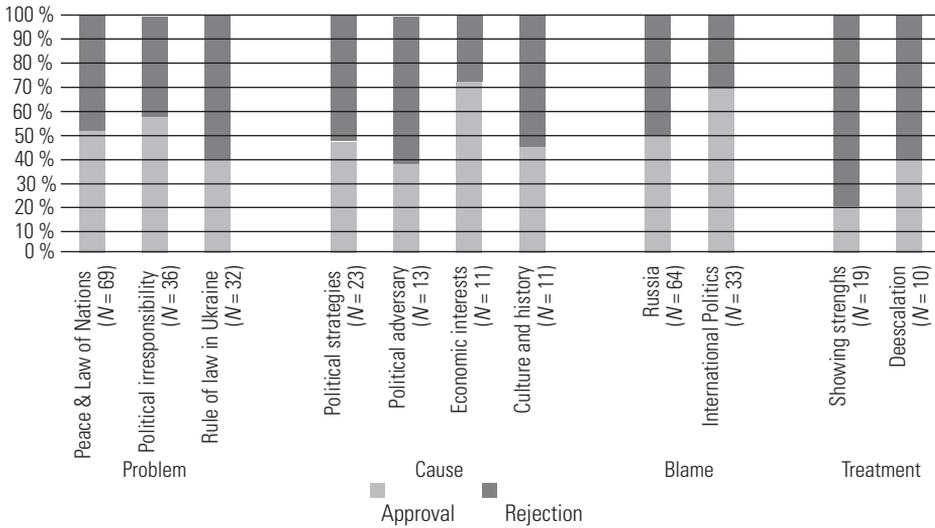
In summary, findings regarding satirical shows’ attention to the crises indicate that the shows provide a similar account of the crises as news media did. Satirical shows focus strongly on highly conflict-ridden events and ignore the pre- and post-conflict events. Their orientation towards national affectedness and the domestication of the migration crisis further indicate that satirical shows follow a similar logic to news media.

Whether or not the content-related depiction of the crises serves the information and orientation function of communication in the public sphere was determined by analyzing crisis frames. Findings reveal that satirical shows mainly focus on problem definitions and attributions of blame, whereas causes and treatment recommendations for a crisis are much less addressed (see table 1). Just as for satire’s and news media’s attention structures, the different emphases on the four frame elements correspond with the conflict orientation of the media and its little focus on contexts and crisis solutions. In both satire and news media, the strong focus on blame can lead to black-and-white-pictures of the conflict parties.

For each of the three crises, we analyzed the addressed frame elements (indicator for information function, RQ2) and the shows’ positions towards the frame elements (indicator for orientation function, RQ3). We argued that, in opposition to news media logic, the indexing thesis does not apply to satirical shows. Consequently, the shows should neither parallel nor approve official political frames, but rather criticize and challenge them with counter-narratives of the crises. During the validation of the research instrument, it became apparent that satirical shows tend to criticize frames by focusing on single frame elements. We therefore decided to present results for the single frame elements instead of identifying whole frames.

In the depiction of the Ukraine crisis, the dominant frame elements are in line with the position of the German government and the majority of parliamentary parties. The most commonly addressed problem definition is that of ‘threats to peace and the law of nations’ due to Russia’s annexation of Crimea (see figure 2). As causal interpretations, political strategies and conflicts are primarily mentioned. Almost every second attribution of blame concerns Russia. This is paralleled by Russia being openly accused by the German government of causing the crisis. Possible solutions include recommendations that the West should show strength against Russia, and that Germany should try to de-escalate the crisis. Both recommendations, although contradictory at first glance, follow the government’s approach. On the one hand, Germany conducted lengthy negotiations with Russia and opposed the delivery of arms to Ukraine, but on the other hand, the German gov-

Figure 2: Addressed frame elements and their evaluation in the Ukraine crisis



Note: All frame elements with a share of 10% and more (total N: problem = 164, cause = 65, blame = 135, treatment = 39)

ernment supported economic sanctions against Russia.

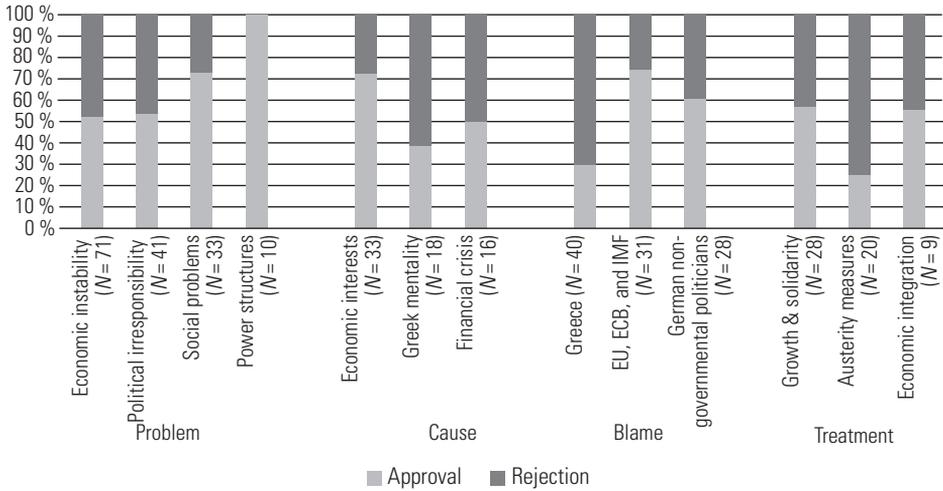
However, differences to the official government communication become obvious when satirical shows position themselves. Most of the frame elements that parallel government communication are addressed with a considerable degree of criticism. The fact that satirical shows reject both options for the solution of the crisis (showing strength against Russia as well as attempting to deescalate the situation) illustrates that the shows question the government’s competence as a responsible crisis manager.

Despite the large share of frame elements that mirror the government’s perspective on the crisis, the shows also include frame elements that provide an alternative view: The shows address the political irresponsibility of Russia and the West alike as the main problem in the crisis. They also attribute blame to international politics including institutions such as NATO and the EU. This is especially true for *Die Anstalt* that unequivocally rejects the blaming of Russia for the crisis. Regarding causal interpretations for the crisis, the shows highlight the economic

interests of both the EU and the U.S. in the former Soviet territory. These alternative frame elements resemble minority positions in the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Left Party and mainly receive approval in the satirical shows. Hence, satire provides a counter-narrative for the Ukraine crisis that is in sharp contrast to the criticized position of the government. The counter-narrative, however, does not offer a problem treatment, and thus provides no orientation for solving the crisis.

Regarding the Greek debt crisis, satirical shows address several aspects of well-known German government communication. They refer to Greece’s economic instability and political irresponsibility as the main problem definitions, along with attribution of blame to Greece and the treatment recommendation to introduce austerity measures (see figure 3). As a causal interpretation, the shows address the stereotype of the lazy Greek, which parallels both government communication and populist positions in the political discourse. However, the shows do not approve of the government crisis frames, but instead criticize them. They wholeheartedly reject the blaming of Greece,

Figure 3: Addressed frame elements and their evaluation in the Greek debt crisis



Note: All frame elements with a share of 10% and more (total N: problem = 180, cause = 85, blame = 139, treatment = 85)

the treatment recommendation of austerity measures, and the populist argument that the Greek mentality has caused the crisis. By contrast, the shows address and approve attribution of blame to German government critics, who are in favour of a “Gexit” and criticise the Greeks’ laziness (most extensively in *Die Anstalt* with 100%, n=12). This relates particularly to politicians of the right-wing party AfD but also to minority voices from the conservative parties CDU and CSU.

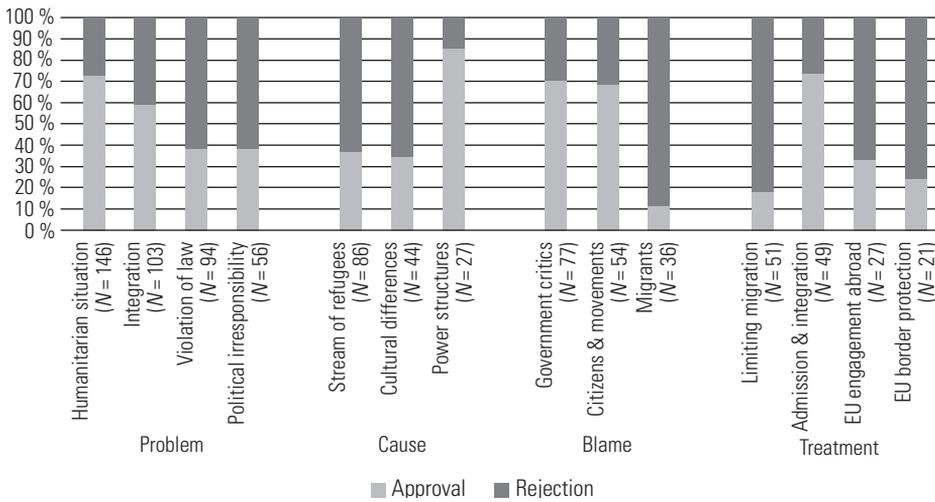
In addition, the shows introduce and approve frame elements that provide a counter-narrative to the Greek debt crisis. They resemble the positions of the Left party and minority positions in the SPD and highlight social problems in Greece as well as addressing power structures in the EU. This results in recommended solutions of 1) showing solidarity by investing in economic growth in Greece and 2) fostering stronger economic integration within the Eurozone, including the idea of Eurobonds. As possible causes for the crisis, the shows point to the economic interests of Germany and other big players in the EU as well as to the 2008 banking crisis. Attributions of blame are directed at inter-

national institutions such as the EU, the European Central Bank (ECB), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which administered and monitored the austerity program for Greece. This narrative tends to describe Greece as the victim of the crisis and attributes responsibility to German and EU crisis management.

The depiction of the migration crisis (see figure 4) shows strong parallels to the government position in Germany. The shows identify the humanitarian situation as the problem and recommend the ‘admission and integration of refugees’ as a solution for the crisis. The government’s more restrictive position in the months after the opening of German borders is addressed by the problem definition of integration, the blaming of both right-wing movements and migrants (if unwilling to integrate), and the treatment recommendation to limit the influx of refugees.

In their evaluation of these frame elements, the shows demonstrate strong approval for the government’s initial position. The later and more restrictive position is barely supported by the shows. While the shows acknowledge integration problems and support the attribution of

Figure 4: Addressed frame elements and their evaluation in the migration crisis



Note: All frame elements with a share of 10% and more (total N: problem=476, cause=213, blame=346, treatment=183)

blame to movements such as PEGIDA, they clearly reject the blaming of refugees and the limiting of the number of incoming migrants as a solution to the crisis.

Furthermore, the shows address and predominantly reject frame elements that are common in populist communication. They position themselves in opposition to the problem definition that the admission of refugees and the suspension of the Schengen and Dublin agreements would violate national and European law. The shows also criticize the populist approach that identifies the stream of refugees and cultural differences as causes for the crisis. In addition, they clearly reject strict EU border protection and EU engagement abroad (e.g., by establishing transit areas in Libya) as a treatment recommendation. In line with this criticism, the shows clearly approve of blaming government critics from AfD and CSU who are (similar to the PEGIDA movement) known for their populist criticism of migration policies.

Overall, satirical shows support an integrative migration policy that mirrors the initial governmental position. They take a firm stand against restrictive migration policies as advocated by populists, conser-

vative politicians, and (in the later course of the crisis) also by the government. In doing so, the satirical show’s initial support for the government position evolves into a counter-narrative in the later stages of the migration crisis.

6 Discussion

Given that news media’s crisis coverage has often been criticized (Entman, 2004; Hamelink, 2011; Lynch & Galtung, 2010; Nohrstedt & Ottosen, 2014), our study focused on whether satirical shows diverge from news media logic. Drawing on the Ukraine, Greek debt, and migration crises, we analyzed satirical shows’ coverage of the crises and their contribution to the information and orientation function of communication in the public sphere.

Concerning the general attention towards crises, satirical shows hardly differ from what is known from news media coverage. In line with news media logic, satire’s coverage of the Ukraine, Greek debt, and migration crises is characterized by a high degree of conflict orientation. The highly conflict-ridden picture of the cri-

ses is furthered by satire's focus on problem definitions and attributions of blame (whilst neglecting causal interpretations and treatment recommendations). The shows' emphasis on blame can be explained by satire's opinionated character, but easily results in a black-and-white picture that news media is also frequently accused of promoting (Hamelink, 2011; Lynch & Galtung, 2010). In addition, satire's attention towards the three crises varies according to the extent of German affectedness. However, except for the migration crisis and opposed to previous findings on news media coverage (Fengler et al., 2018; Nienstedt, Kepplinger, & Quiring, 2015), national affectedness is not stressed by a domestication of the crises. Overall, the quantity as well as the quality of satirical shows' attention to the three crises are basically aligned with principles of news media coverage.

Regarding the information function, the satirical shows also tend to follow news media logic. As the indicator for this function served the frame elements that were addressed by the satirical shows. In their depiction of the crises, the shows primarily address frame elements that are in line with the German government's position. This supports the indexing thesis and refers, for instance, to the blaming of Greece and Russia in the Greek and Ukraine crises respectively. Alternative frames that contradict the government's position are included to a lesser extent. They usually relate to the minority positions of individual politicians or opposition parties. Different perspectives on the crises, therefore, stem from political discourse; satirical shows do not present alternative frames for the crises. Thus, the indexing thesis applies to news media and satire alike and satirical shows do not compensate for news media's shortcomings concerning the information function.

Additional value for public discourse, however, arises regarding the orientation function. Even though satire primarily uses frame elements that are in line with government positions, it mainly *rejects* these positions (thus challenging the indexing thesis). In doing so, the shows pro-

vide critical orientation. This is especially true for satire's coverage of the Greek debt crisis, but also for the profound skepticism about the government's approach to solving the Ukraine crisis. The shows thus refrain from joining in a rally-around-the-flag stance that news media are repeatedly criticized for. In the Greek debt and the migration crises, the shows extent their criticism to populist frames that highlight, for instance, the stereotype of Greek laziness in the Greek debt crisis or insurmountable cultural differences in the migration crisis. It can thus be concluded that satire's contribution to communicative functions in the public sphere lies in attacking existing positions (by addressing and rejecting them), rather than in providing completely new frame elements. This finding is well in line with satire's critical stance on politics.

Besides critical orientation, the shows also offer a more productive form of orientation by providing counter-narratives for the crises. In the Ukraine and Greek debt crises this occurs by approving minority positions held by the left political spectrum. By contrast, in the migration crisis, the shows approve the initial government position. This position, however, serves as a counter-narrative in the later stages of the crisis when the government had shifted towards a more restrictive position.

Despite format differences, the depiction of the crises in *heute show*, *Neo Magazin Royale* and *Die Anstalt* differs only slightly. Although the extent of crisis coverage varies between the shows, they are quite similar regarding their degree of conflict-orientation and domestication, as well as their use and evaluation of frame elements.

In conclusion, political satirical shows differ from news media not so much in *what is presented* about a crisis, but in *how it is evaluated*. The small amount of additional value concerning the information function can be explained by news media being the central source for satire's crisis coverage. However, given that satire is a particularly opinionated genre, the shows present manifold evaluations regarding crisis aspects. These evaluations clearly go beyond a simple mirroring of political

power relations. Satirical shows offer a different perspective on the crises and prove to be a beneficial addition to news media. Their coverage might motivate the audience to reflect critically on the government's crisis management and to question the dominant frames of the news media.

The limitations of our study are mainly due to its restriction to crisis coverage in satirical shows. It lacks a systematic comparison with news media coverage and with political positions. Our comparison relies on general knowledge of media performance in international crises and the few empirical studies on German media coverage of these three crises. Also, a thorough analysis of indexing would require the coding of frame sponsors in the satirical shows. Future studies should consider this in order to provide insights into whether approval and rejection of a frame element are linked with specific actors (e.g., journalists, politicians or civil-society actors).

Despite these limitations, our results facilitate interesting insights into satire's crisis coverage and satire's relationship to news media. Firstly, satire is dependent on news media. They serve not only as the most important source of information for satirical shows but also prepare the ground for satire's critical jokes. This is because news media provide the audience with the information on issues and positions, which is a crucial precondition for understanding the jokes. Secondly, satire can compensate for shortcomings of the news media and confront them with their own weaknesses. Satire might even inspire journalists to consider alternative story lines for a crisis rather than relying on governmental frames. In summary, it is reasonable to assume a reciprocal relationship between journalism and satire. Future studies might want to analyze this relationship and the interactions between satire and news media in more detail. In this context, it would be interesting to explore whether or not differences in the depiction of political issues can be traced back to different role concepts of journalists and satirists.

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